

# NJ OFFICE OF MINORITY HEALTH

## ASTHMA

### FACT SHEET

---

#### ***What is asthma?***

- ◆ Asthma is a chronic and serious lung condition that makes breathing difficult.
- ◆ It is a disease that makes your lungs inflamed or swollen and sensitive.
- ◆ People with asthma have episodes or attacks when the air passages in their lungs get narrow making it hard to breathe in or out.

#### ***What causes an asthma attack?***

- ◆ People with asthma have lungs that are sensitive to things called “***triggers***”. Triggers cause airways to become irritable or narrow when they are near or come in contact with substances or situations which asthmatics are very sensitive. Some examples of triggers include:
  - ◆ Cigarette smoke
  - ◆ Air pollution
  - ◆ Pollen, trees and fresh cut grass
  - ◆ Cockroaches
  - ◆ Dust mites
  - ◆ Household pets
  - ◆ Crying, yelling or laughing hard

#### ***What happens before, during, and after an asthma attack?***

- ◆ Triggers cause an attack in people with asthma.
- ◆ Muscles surrounding the air tubes squeeze tight.
- ◆ Airways become inflamed or irritable causing them to become too narrow and produce mucus. Mucus is a sticky liquid, which further clogs the air tubes.
- ◆ The air tubes remain inflamed and this inflammation makes the lungs more sensitive to triggers and lead to more asthma attacks.
- ◆ When airways become narrow and blocked with mucus this causes wheezing (a whistling noise when you breathe), coughing, shortness of breath, or chest tightness (the feeling that someone is squeezing or sitting on your chest).
- ◆ Finally, a vicious cycle can develop when asthma strikes...

#### ***How is asthma treated?***

- ◆ There are two main kinds of medicines for asthma:
  - ◆ Long-term control (preventive medicine): The medicines that work slowly over many weeks to stop the swelling or inflammation in the airways.
  - ◆ Quick relief (rescue medicine): The medicines that give short-term (quick relief) from asthma symptoms.
  - ◆ A rescue medicine helps stop an asthma attack that has already started or keep an attack from getting serious.

#### ***How do you manage asthma?***

- ◆ Develop a partnership with your health provider.
- ◆ Avoid or control your triggers.
- ◆ Learn about your “asthma zones” and how to use your special devices (such as, inhalers, peak flow meters, and nebulizers).
- ◆ Use your medications properly as directed by your health care provider.
- ◆ Use a peak flow meter often to measure how well you can push air out of your lungs.
- ◆ Keep a daily diary of your breathing.
- ◆ Make an appointment often with your health provider for follow-up care.
- ◆

#### ***What's important for you to know?***

- ◆ Asthma cannot be cured, but it can be controlled with the proper treatment.
- ◆ Exercise regularly. Talk to your health provider about an exercise program.
- ◆ People with asthma can learn to identify and avoid the things that trigger an attack.

- ◆ Always remember that your asthma does not go away when your symptoms go away.
- ◆ Most people with asthma can educate themselves about medications and the disease to live a full and active life.

### ***Is asthma a major problem for minorities?***

- ◆ Asthma affects people of all races and ethnic groups, especially minorities in NJ.
- ◆ In the U.S., asthma is one of the leading causes of missed school and work days.
- ◆ Asthma was the primary diagnosis for 13% of African-American children hospitalized in 1997 between 1-14 years and 7% of Hispanic children hospitalized in the same age group in New Jersey.
- ◆ Although African-Americans represent about 13% of the U.S. population,—one in eight—they represent 22% —one in five— of deaths due to asthma, nationally.

### ***What are some of the common myths or false ideas about asthma?***

- ◆ Myth: Many people think they only have asthma when they have trouble breathing. They think asthma comes and goes, day by day or week by week.
- ◆ Fact: People with asthma have it all the time for many years. When they have trouble breathing, they are having an asthma attack or an asthma flare-up. On those days, their asthma is not under control.
- ◆ Myth: Many people think asthma is an emotional disease. They mistakenly believe that if you are an emotional person then you get asthma.
- ◆ Fact: Emotions do not cause asthma. But, if you have asthma, crying, yelling or laughing hard can start an asthma attack.
- ◆ Myth: Many people think you can't play sports if you have asthma.
- ◆ Fact: Many star athletes have asthma like Jackie Joyner Kersee, Dominique Wilkins and many Olympic athletes. The important point to remember is to get a good medicine plan from you doctor to prevent attacks.

## **ASTHMA CONTACTS AND REFERRALS**

If you would like more information about asthma, please contact the following organizations or your health care provider:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <b>Office of Minority Health</b><br/>New Jersey Department of Health &amp; Senior Services; (609-292-6962)<br/>Internet: <a href="http://www.state.nj.us/health">http://www.state.nj.us/health</a></li> <li>❑ <b>American Lung Association</b><br/>1-800-586-4872 or (1-800-LUNG-USA)<br/>Internet: <a href="http://www.lungusa.org">http://www.lungusa.org</a></li> <li>❑ <b>Allergy and Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics, Inc.</b> (1-800-878-4403)<br/>Internet: <a href="http://www.podi.com/health/aanma">http://www.podi.com/health/aanma</a></li> <li>❑ <b>American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology;</b> (1-800-822-2762)<br/>Internet: <a href="http://www.aaaai.org">http://www.aaaai.org</a></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <b>American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology;</b> (1-800-824-7777)<br/>Internet: <a href="http://allergy.mcg.edu">http://allergy.mcg.edu</a></li> <li>❑ <b>Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America</b><br/>(1-800-727-8462)<br/>Internet: : <a href="http://www.aafa.org">http://www.aafa.org</a></li> <li>❑ <b>National Jewish Medical and Research Center</b><br/>(Lung Line), (1-800-222-5864)<br/>Internet: <a href="http://www.njc.org">http://www.njc.org</a></li> <li>❑ <b>National Asthma Education and Prevention Program</b><br/>National Heart Lung and Blood Information Center<br/>(301-251-1222)<br/>Internet: <a href="http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/nhlbi/nhlbi.htm">http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/nhlbi/nhlbi.htm</a></li> </ul> |
|--|--|

Sources: Practical Guide for the Diagnosis and Management of Asthma, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, 10/97. New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Center for Health Statistics. American Lung Association of New Jersey. National Cooperative Inner-City Asthma Study.

---

This publication was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Public Health Service, Region II, Office of Minority Health. The purpose of this document is to support a community health education project and is distributed for information purposes only. Consult your physician or health care provider for medical information.